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TESTIMONY

“The Pittsburgh Experience: How Has the Community Development
Block Grant Program Shaped the Steel City?”

The Community Development Block Grant program provides invaluable assistance to municipal governments in Washington County Pennsylvania for a myriad of projects that, otherwise, could not be completed.

The funds are distributed to municipalities on a rotational basis which allows the local officials to budget and plan accordingly. As you are aware, municipal governments are charged with numerous responsibilities on an extremely limited budget, whereby they rely on CDBG monies to maximize the benefits to the residents without inflicting financial burden on the taxpayers. The funds are utilized for road/bridge projects (gap funding); redevelopment/revitalization studies, plans and construction and comprehensive planning/implementation ordinances.

In addition to numerous downtown/business district improvements, the funds have been utilized in large part for the benefit of our senior population. The Home Rehabilitation Program provides assistance to low and moderate income households, predominantly elderly, to complete repairs on their homes which results in a higher quality housing stock and allows seniors to stay in their homes. On average, approximately 25% of projects completed are for senior citizens. Recently, three cases resulted in improvements that, otherwise, could not have been completed by the elderly homeowners due to financial constraints and difficulty coordinating such extensive home repairs. Robert and Joan Golbraith of Canonsburg had the exterior of their house painted and their back porch rebuilt through the program. LouAnn and Eugene Clark of Washington received new siding, new windows and a garage roof. Joyce Carroll and Francis Vennon of Washington now live in a home with a new roof, a new porch and repaired bedroom that had suffered water damage from the old roof. Again, these repairs allowed these seniors to continue living in their homes and improved the overall quality and value of their homes for energy efficiency, safety and resale in the future.

On a larger scale, the funds have been utilized toward the development of high density, affordable senior housing. In New Eagle Borough, an abandoned, dilapidated hospital facility was acquired, demolished and remediated with CDBG funds to allow for the construction of a new senior housing facility which provided much needed housing for the area and restored the site to the tax rolls resulting in a revenue increase in excess of \$130,000. This 4 story elderly housing facility offers 42 apartments for low income seniors and was chosen to receive a Regional Award of Excellence by the Middle Atlantic Regional Council of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials. The benefits realized by our seniors alone justify the need for the continuation of this program.

Nevertheless, other less visible projects provide far reaching benefits as well. Many fire departments serving low-income communities have completed rehabilitation to their fire stations and purchased fire and rescue equipment with CDBG monies. Again, fire departments provide a critical service with little dedicated funding sources.

Water and sanitary sewer service has been provided; roads and bridges have been improved, including a major slide repair in Carroll Township resulting from an underground spring from an abandoned mine shaft, which, due to the complexity of the stabilization process and road re-construction, would have severely impacted the entire transportation budget for the township, county and region if CDBG funds were not available; community parks and playgrounds have been constructed; multi-municipal plans have been developed to allow communities to plan for and control development and improvements to facilities dedicated to providing supportive services to families, children and mental health clients have been completed; and, finally, development of new Head Start school facilities have been realized to provide better educational opportunities to low-income children.

The program is so all-encompassing it is difficult to provide a thumb nail sketch of the impacts. All facets of the population are touched in some manner which results in a greater good for the entire County. CDBG funds benefit our children directly with educational opportunities, housing assistance and program development. CDBG funds benefit our elderly through housing opportunities, both rehabilitation of single family homes allowing our seniors to remain independent but also through development of senior housing facilities which meets a growing need for our aging population. CDBG funds benefit our residents overall by providing assistance to municipalities to provide the services needed such as water; sewer; road/bridge repairs especially those not anticipated; as well as providing for fire and emergency services and revitalization projects which, ultimately, increase the tax revenues and allow for the local governments to finance additional improvements in their respective communities.

This program is dedicated to low-moderate income households. Please do not forget that the most important components of that classification remain our elderly and our children. I think we can all agree that we, collectively, share the responsibility of ensuring that they are cared for and given every opportunity available. That is a snapshot of the importance of the CDBG program in Washington County.